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The tobacco industry is winning again: study finds that young adults and Latinos use flavored cigars more than other groups

(Washington, D.C.). Despite an FDA ban on flavored cigarettes dating to 2009, the tobacco industry continues hooking our young adults on products that taste like candy, smell like fruit, and are in many instances comparable to cigarettes with regard to shape, size, filters, and packaging. According to a new study funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and published by the journal *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, more than two-fifths (42.5%) of current cigar smokers report using flavored cigars, cigarillos and very small cigars. The study also observes significant disparities in flavored cigar use across subpopulations, including higher prevalence among young adult cigar smokers, Hispanic/Latino cigar smokers, and LGBT cigar smokers than other groups.

In light of the findings in this study, along with evidence from past studies that 90% of all smokers start smoking before the age of 18 and 99% before the age of 25, public health experts and advocates have expressed grave concern that youth and other groups disproportionately affected by tobacco-related disparities bear the brunt of the public health toll of flavored cigars. "The tobacco industry has been pushing flavored little cigars, cigarillos and cigars to keep our youth and our Latino and low-income communities addicted to nicotine and spending what little extra money they have on these products. While our communities get sicker, they keep lining their pockets," said Dr. Jeannette Noltenius, National Director of NLTCN.

The landmark Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which was enacted in 2009, gave the FDA the authority to regulate tobacco products, including the ability to propose certain requirements and restrictions on marketing, manufacturing and distribution. While the FDA used their authority to ban flavored cigarettes shortly after the law's enactment, other flavored tobacco products, such as flavored cigars, cigarillos and little cigars, can still be legally manufactured, distributed and sold in the U.S.

Citing the striking resemblance of some flavored cigars to flavored cigarettes, Dr. Noltenius characterizes the marketing of flavored cigars as representative of the tobacco industry's efforts to "avert" FDA regulation. "When you compare cigarettes to 'little cigars,' in some cases there are minimal differences between the two categories: cigarettes have white paper wrappers, while some little cigars are of the exact same size and shape as cigarettes, just with brown or tobacco leaf-colored wrappers," she said.

Research shows that flavors can mask the natural harshness and taste of tobacco, making these products easier to use and increasing their appeal among young people. Cigars contain the same toxic and cancer-causing chemicals found in cigarettes, so they are not a safe alternative to cigarettes. The health consequences of regular cigar smoking include cancers of the lung, larynx, oral cavity, and esophagus. Cigar smokers who inhale, particularly those who smoke several cigars a day, are also at increased risk of developing heart disease and COPD.

“Flavorings—whether candy, wine, chocolate, or menthol—make the poison contained in cigars go down ‘smoother,’ make the taste less harsh on the throat, and therefore, make the smoker believe that since they are flavored, that they are less harmful. It is alarming that Latinos use these products nearly twice as often as their white or black counterparts,” said Dr. Noltenius.

Key findings of the new CDC study include:

- 6.6 percent of adults in the United States smoke cigars.
- Among cigar smokers, flavored cigar smoking was more common among those with a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED) (65.3 percent) and those with annual household income under \$20,000 (51.7 percent).
- Flavored cigar use was higher among Latino/Hispanic cigar smokers (61.7 percent) than among non-Hispanic white (37.9 percent) and black (39.4 percent) cigar smokers.
- Flavored cigar use was significantly higher among female (60.8 percent) cigar smokers than male (39.2 percent).
- A higher percentage of LGBT cigar smokers used flavored cigars (67.0 percent) than heterosexual cigar smokers (41.8 percent).
- The five states with the highest percent of flavored cigar use among adult cigar smokers were North Dakota (71.6 percent), New Mexico (69 percent), Colorado (68.9 percent), Minnesota (59 percent) and Nebraska (59 percent).
- The states with the lowest were New Hampshire (11.1 percent), New Jersey (23.7 percent), Washington (28.3 percent), Hawaii (30.5 percent) and Alaska (33.4 percent).

The study also finds flavored cigar use is less common among older adults and those with more education and income. Flavored cigars are especially popular among 18- to 24-year-olds—more than 57 percent of cigar smokers in that age group say they smoke flavored cigars. Nearly 43 percent of all adult cigar smokers in the United States report using flavored cigars. Data from the study—the first to assess the use of flavored cigars at both the state and national levels—were obtained from the 2009-2010 National Adult Tobacco Survey.

“Whether candy or fruit-flavored, longer, shorter or fatter, cancer sticks are cancer sticks. Whether little cigars, cigarrillos, or cigars, they are still bad products, tobacco companies don’t tell you what’s in them, and they don’t state that they’re designed to get young people and young adults hooked to nicotine. Latinos cannot continue being duped by an industry that is simply finding new ways to make their hard-earned money go up in smoke. Making it in America is hard enough without throwing away our hard-earned dollars,” Dr. Noltenius concluded.

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL LATINO TOBACCO CONTROL NETWORK (NLTCN)

The National Latino Tobacco Control Network (NLTCN) is an open information and support system for tobacco control and health disparities advocates and experts who want to become more effective in changing policies and social norms around tobacco control through the exchange of information and personal and institutional linkages. NLTCN produces newsletters, reports and other publications about best practices in tobacco control, and organizes events and training opportunities around the U.S. NLTCN’s website (www.latinotobaccocontrol.org) serves as a resource with links to repositories of tobacco control materials, curriculums and reports to help advocates do their work.